

## RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES OF PROTESTANT ORGANIZATIONS AND DENOMINATIONS IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCES OF VIETNAM AT PRESENT

***Abstract:** Currently, Protestantism has rapidly developed in ethnic minority areas in the northern mountainous provinces and in the delta and urban areas. In a published article in the Religious Studies Review No. 12 in 2020, the author mentioned the missionary history of Protestantism in the northern provinces of Vietnam from the beginning to the present. That article analyzed the results of evangelization in each period and the presence and distribution of organizations and denominations in the provinces. This article will indicate the religious activities of Protestant organizations and denominations in the Northern provinces, including missionary activities and religious activities of organizations and denominations.*

***Keywords:** Protestantism; North Vietnam; Missionary; organization; practice.*

### **Introduction**

In recent years, there have been many published studies on the religious situation and reasons for conversion to Protestantism among the H'mong people. Besides, there have been several documents and articles on Protestant activities in the Northern provinces during the recent period such as many documents and applications for recognition of the legal status of denominational organizations (from 2005 to 2007) with a Brief History of denominations' formation, Doctrine, and organization. They are official documents to research

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Protestant organizations and denominations. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Protestantism coming to Vietnam (1911-2011), there have been many documents about the activities of Protestantism through historical periods. Notably, it can be mentioned the book edited by Pastor- President of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South) Thai Phuoc Truong: *“The Evangelical Church of Vietnam 100 Years of Formation and Development”*. In 2011, Reimer, who served as a missionary for many years in Vietnam before 1975 and still has a connection to the Protestant community there, published a book titled *“Vietnam’s Christians: A Century of Growth in Adversity”*. The author reviewed the missionary stages of Protestantism in Vietnam through more than a hundred pages, in which, the missionary and conversion movements in recent decades were mentioned at the end of the book. In the years 2010, 2011, and 2012, three conferences were organized by the Institute for Religious Studies in collaboration with Protestant Churches with the theme: Protestantism in Vietnam in the periods from 1911 to 1975 and from 1975 to 2011; Protestantism and Vietnamese culture. These conferences consisted of essays on many aspects of Protestant activities. These are valuable documents even though they are initial studies.

In 2014, Thieu Thi Huong wrote her master’s thesis: *“The Process of Establishment and Development of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) - Issues for the Protestant Affairs Today”* which mentioned many issues related to the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North). In 2016, the Hanoi Evangelical Church celebrated its 100th anniversary, publishing the yearbook: *“Jesus the Victor: A Brief History of the Formation and Development of the Hanoi Evangelical Church during the period from 1916 to 2016 & Vision for the Future”* with many notable historical data. Moreover, there was a proceedings of the Hanoi Protestant community: *“1916-2016 The development of the Hanoi Protestant community, reflections on the past, the present and vision of the future”*. It included several presentations by representatives of different Protestant denominations and groups.

In 2018, the book *“Cultural and Social Changes of Protestant Communities in some ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Areas (from 2005 to present)”* edited by Tran Thi Hong Yen (Social Sciences Publishing House) is an elaborate research, updating many new issues and situations among the Hmong Protestants. In 2019 the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) and Hanoi Bible School published the book *“Protestantism, historical and Present Marks (Conference to Celebrate 500 Years of Protestantism)”*, which collected articles about Protestantism in the world and region, and presentations of a seminar organized in Hanoi in 2017. Recently, in 2019, Do Quang Hung published an article: *“Protestantism in Vietnam, An Overview”* posted on the website of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs, which contained a fairly comprehensive analysis of its origin, characteristics, and stages of formation of the Protestant community in Vietnam.

In general, the aforementioned documents, articles, and works are important sources for conducting this research. However, it can be said that there are almost no works to be specific and detailed on the Protestant community in the Northern provinces in particular and the current activities of Protestant organizations and denominations in particular.

Based on the practical activities of Protestantism in Vietnam in general and the Northern provinces in particular, this article aims to clarify the following issues: Religious activities of the Protestant community, including organizations, and different denominations, how is it happening over time and present in the Northern provinces? What are the advantages and disadvantages? What issues need attention in policy management and implementation?

Because the research topic involves many different dimensions of social and religious life, this research will be approached from the perspective of structure - function and religion - culture, and the historical method.

## **1. Religious activities of Protestants in the Northern provinces of Vietnam today**

Religious activities include religious practices and operating religious organizations, as well as religious propagation. Religious activities are the expression of religious faith, the practices of doctrine, canons, and rituals.

Researching and analyzing the aforementioned activities of Protestantism face many difficulties due to the diversity of legal status, denominational characteristics, and organizational scale of groups and denominations, in addition to the impacts and influences of the government and society. The paper will analyze the issues in the field of religious activities of some Protestant organizations and denominations, and their missionary activities.

Firstly, it is necessary to mention the important factors that help the believers have normal religious activities: *Location of religious activities (related to facilities, and legal regulations); Dignitaries guide religious activities; the Scriptures are used for practicing religious rituals*

### ***1.1. Essential conditions related to religious activities***

#### ***Locations of religious activities and registration for centralized religious activities***

The policy on Protestantism has been implemented for fifteen years (since Directive No. 01/2005/CT-TTg dated February 4, 2005, of the Prime Minister), solving many problems and gradually bringing Protestant activities into a normal state. Recently, the implementation of *the Law on Belief and Religion (Luật tín ngưỡng, tôn giáo)*, and the direction of institutionalizing guarantee the religious freedom and practice of faith in general and the Protestant community in particular.

At present, in Vietnam, almost all major Protestant organizations and denominations have been recognized as legal entities, while, small Protestant denominations and groups have gradually registered their religious activities with the local government such as ward and commune offices. Thus, these guidelines and policies have contributed

to creating a stable and consistent legal corridor to ensure the freedom of belief and religion of the citizens in general and Protestants in particular.

According to data from the management agency: After two years of implementing the Law on Belief and Religion, by April 2019, the whole country had more than 1.12 million Protestants, including over 855,000 people of more than forty ethnic minorities, the largest number is the Hmong (270,000 people), the Rhade (124,000 people), Jarais (99,000 people), the K'ho (67,000 people), the Stieng (60,000 people). There were nine Protestant organizations with legal entities and a Representative Board, two organizations have been granted registration for religious activities (including about seventy other Protestant organizations and groups registered by the commune level); 2,253 dignitaries, 6,851 assistants for dignitaries, 757 affiliated religious organizations, 576 churches, 5,456 groups. In addition, about 8,500 foreigners were participating in religious activities in forty-nine groups of thirteen provinces in the Northern mountainous region (including Thanh Hoa and Nghe An). Protestantism has gone from being “stealthy”, and “secretive” in an unusual way among the Hmong and Dao people, it is accepted and put into legal management through the issuance of centralized religious activities registration for 797 groups, accounting for 48.8%. The number of hot spots and lawsuits against Protestantism has significantly decreased, The disunity in the village between Protestants and non- Protestants was resolved. The phenomenon of migration among the Hmong people has reduced. The Protestant groups have an open attitude and cooperate with local authorities [Nguyễn Ngọc Bảo, 2019].

According to the data of 2019, the northern provinces from Nghe An outwards currently had 254,469 Protestants, of which 233,855 people of ethnic minorities, 559 dignitaries, 772 assistants for dignitaries, twenty-eight affiliated religious organizations, fifteen churches, one dignitary training facility, 2,049 groups (918 groups have been granted registration for centralized religious activities). In the Northern mountainous area, there were more than 235,635 Protestants, of which

233,619 people of ethnic minorities (95% Hmong, followed by Dao people), 389 dignitaries, 525 assistants for dignitaries, 9 local churches (chi hội), two churches; 1,631 groups (797 groups have been granted registration for centralized religious activities), respectively accounting for 21.01% of believers, 17,3% of dignitaries, 7,7% of assistants for dignitaries, 0,3% of Protestant worship facilities nationwide [Vũ Tin Lành (Protestant Department), 2020].

Summarizing data of ten years of implementation of Directive No.01/2005/CT-TTg dated February 4, 2005 of the Prime Minister on Protestantism in 2015 showed that the Northern provinces from Nghe An outwards had 199,675 Protestants, of which 181,717 ethnic minority people, 545 dignitaries, 600 assistants for dignitaries, sixteen affiliated religious organizations, fourteen churches, one dignity training facility, 1,704 groups (584 groups have been granted registration for centralized religious activities). Thus, compared to 2019 (after only 4 years), the number of Protestants increased by 54,933 people; the number of dignitaries increased by more than fifteen people; the number of groups increased by about 345 groups. [Vũ Tin Lành (Protestant Department), 2020].

The aforementioned data shows that accepting registration for centralized religious activities of groups is the first step to legalizing the religious activities of believers. At present, thirteen northern mountainous provinces (including Thanh Hoa and Nghe An) have approved and put them under legal management through the issuance of centralized religious activity registration for 797 groups in total 1,631 groups, accounting for 48.8%. Especially, in 2 years (2017-2018), Tuyen Quang, Thai Nguyen, and Yen Bai provinces have successfully piloted the approval of the establishment of 07 local churches from groups that have been granted registration for centralized religious activities with 2 models:

- 1) Establishment of a church from a group.

- 2) Some groups of believers with the same organization, language, solidarity, and convenient transportation established a church with a central church and affiliated groups.

Religious activities of Protestantism in legal churches and groups took place purely and stably, complying with the Party's guidelines and policies, the State's laws as well as local regulations. The number of hot spots and lawsuits against Protestantism has decreased significantly in comparison to the past. The disunity in villages and hamlets among Protestants and non-Protestants has been resolved. The phenomenon of migration among the Hmong people has reduced. Protestant groups have an open attitude and cooperate with local authorities. In the past, activities of training, and ordaining dignitaries and assistants for dignitaries of Protestantism according to the provisions of law were limited to only the provinces of Thai Nguyen, Lang Son, and Tuyen Quang. At present, they include Lai Chau, Dien Bien, Ha Giang, Lao Cai, and Cao Bang, Bac Kan. In March 2015, the number of dignitaries in this area was 278 people, mainly illegal ordination (*phong chui*). At present, the number of legally ordained dignitaries has gradually increased (Lai Chau: 43; Ha Giang: 26, Thai Nguyen: 20), the number of illegal ordained dignitaries has decreased, and their activities gradually comply with the law.

Besides the aforementioned achievements, some limitations are also revealed as follows:

The number of unregistered groups is large number with 834 groups (equivalent to 51%) almost in the Northern mountainous region and are mainly Protestant organizations that have not been recognized by the State; Over 70 Protestant organizations have not been granted organizational registration while these organizations still carry out their activities of a true religious organization (training, ordaining, appointing dignitaries, etc.); international relations; building worship facilities; evangelization; congress; conference).

Unrecognized Protestant organizations and some religious activities needs of foreigners legally residing in Vietnam are still facing difficulties within the scope of regulation of the law on belief and religion. Therefore, the State management of foreign Protestant organizations that have not been granted operating registration by the State is very limited. The State management mainly includes activities

such as propaganda, dissemination of laws, mobilizing activities at home, and guiding and granting registration for religious activities according to groups.

After registration, it is slow to establish affiliated religious organizations, many groups have more than ten years of legal activities, however, they have not yet been a local church. The process of approving the establishment of affiliated religious organizations revealed many shortcomings such as the request to gather too many groups while the distance among the groups was too far, differences of languages, cultures, and ethnicities; and lack of land for religious purposes.

Building Protestant churches and chapels still has many shortcomings. Religious facility is one of the two legitimate and essential needs of religious believers. For Protestants, the place of worship of God does not need to be a “religious facility” because most Protestant organizations can accept ceremonies at a rented location, or even a “private location” such as a believer’s house that is used alternately for mass meetings during the week. However, renting legal places for Protestant religious activities is generally still very difficult in practice. Thousands of Protestant groups of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous region are organizing religious activities with the participation of tens to thousands of believers in the small area which were the believers’ houses, originally designed for a household. Although changing locations for religious activities is regulated by law, it is not easy to change due to many reasons. The allocation of land and the leasing of legal places for religious activities have not been resolved following actual needs. In many places, land allocation is difficult because of a lack of land funds and no land for religious purposes. Most cases of land allocation to build churches are the process of “legalizing” land and religious facilities that have previously been purchased and built under their names. The above-mentioned inadequacies related to land for religious facilities of Protestantism are expected to arise if there is no policy to resolve them.

### ***Training dignitaries***

At present, the government's permission for re-establishment of the Hanoi Bible School and promotion of training dignitaries activities for the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North), the largest Protestant organization in the North, helped to gradually resolve the difficult issue of this church. In the Theology training programs of the College and University with a one-year internship, the School has enrolled three university courses with a total of hundreds of students.

In addition, the basic catechist classes of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) for thousands of believers from associations and groups such as women, middle-aged, adults, and youth groups; many theology courses for thousands of personnel in churches and groups have met the needs of church management throughout the North.

Appointments and ordinations have been carried out regularly since the resumption of congresses, especially from 2017 to the present. The Church's work has had many changes and updates. The elected positions such as the "Ethnic Vice President" and the members of the General Assembly's Executive Board have been typical ethnic minority pastors that led to the trust, and obedience of ethnic minority believers.

However, it is also necessary to pay attention to the management and authority of local authorities in carrying out the transfer and appointment procedures. The shortcomings such as the work of training dignitaries, assistants for dignitaries, ordinations, and appointments still cannot be resolved according to the law when there are still more than seventy Protestant denominations and groups that have not been licensed to operate. There are recognized denominations that have not yet been able to establish training schools. Most Protestant dignitaries are still trained in hidden or cross-denominational training in flexible forms without official permission and recognition from the authorities at all levels.

### ***Christian Scriptures and publications***

Currently, according to *the Law on Belief and Religion*, Article 54. *Publishing, production, exportation and importation of cultural products*. It is permitted to publish scriptures and other publications

on folk belief and religion; to produce, export and import cultural products concerning folk belief and religion and religious articles pursuant to the legislation on publication and other legal regulations.

For the Protestant communities, Christian publications such as the Bible, hymns, books explaining the Bible, spiritual books, books, and magazines are always important to nourish the spiritual life of believers in the Church. In fact, before 2001, the issue of scriptures for the Protestant community was still allowed by the State to be imported and printed to serve dignitaries and believers.

From 1992 to 1994: The Vietnamese Bible publishing program was allowed by the government to import 33,000 books of Bibles and 20,000 of books hymns. From 1994 to 2000: The government licensed the printing of 65,000 books of the New and Old Testaments, 85,000 books of the New Testament, 25,000 books of Hymns, 80,000 books of the Gospel, and 120,000 books of Bible stories.

In addition to the publication of the Bibles and books, the need to republish internal magazines (monthly magazines) has also been raised. Recently, the two internal newsletters of the two major Protestant organizations have been periodically published. In the coming years, the need for publications for Protestant dignitaries will increase. Moreover, it is necessary to understand that publications and scriptures for Protestants are not only to satisfy the needs of believers, but they are also particularly important means of evangelization.

Currently, for Protestant dignitaries, printed publications such as Bibles and books of hymns have met demand. Under the sponsorship of the Bible Society and many Protestant organizations all over the world, more than a dozen Bible translations have been printed and circulated. The source of Bibles and hymns has never been as abundant as it is today, and it is even a source of controversy and disunity among Protestants, for example, the recent New Translation of the Bible. In addition, other Christian publications such as spiritual Growth, Bible interpretations, Sunday lessons, and brochures for witnessing were printed in large numbers. As commented by Pastor Thai Phuoc Truong- President of the

Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South), since books have been popularized, besides the benefits, there have also been harms because the books do not only come from orthodox sources”. [Thái Phước Trường, 2011: 125].

From 2004 to 2014, particularly for the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North), the Religious Publishing House’s (Nhà xuất bản Tôn giáo) statistics showed that the Church has published 310 books with 2,566,631 printed copies and 66,364,000 printed pages, mainly the Bible and Hymn. Although compared to the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South), this number is only one-third, it is far superior to the actual conditions of the Church and much larger than the recently recognized churches.

The rapid development of science and technology during the 4.0 revolution has posed new problems in communication and scriptures serving the religious activities of believers. Protestantism has used advanced achievements in the fields of communication, information, and the global Internet. It has had new missionary methods such as using electronic scriptures and modern media to preach, train clergy, and care for believers, especially in an industrial society and rapid urbanization in many regions and countries. Especially during the recent epidemic, online religious activities and preaching have become popular and familiar. It can be said that publishing paper scriptures will be a thing of the past with the current rapid development of smartphones and other audio-visual media.

### ***1.2. Religious life***

#### *The practices of religious doctrine, canons, and rituals*

Many authors, through recent research projects, have described from an ethnographic and anthropological perspective the rituals and lifestyle of the Hmong Protestants with interesting conclusions. However, the problem is quite simple and clear with one principle: once you become a Protestant, you must abandon all rituals of funerals, weddings, shamans, and ancestor worship of traditional religions to practice Protestant rituals.

Protestantism emphasizes propagating and teaching believers about rituals to worship God. It insists on compliance with rules as dogmas in the life of faith. This is immutable and applies to every community, and every local church, including Kinh people or ethnic minority people. Those principles are as follows:

*First*, Protestants only worship God, and strictly prohibit all other forms of worship. For newly converted residents, banning worship and abandoning old traditions is common.

*Second*, Protestantism completely prohibits the worship of images, objects, pictures, statues of Saints, and relics of Saints, this worship is considered as a serious error of faith.

The core of Protestant worship rituals (for most denominations) is reading the Bible and preaching the Bible (reading and understanding God's word). Then, it is praying. Prayers can be modeled- often quoted from the Bible or a believer composes when he/ she is praying.

Singing hymns to praise God is an indispensable part of every worship ritual because "Christianity without singing and praise God is like this earth without sunlight".

The ritual of worship of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) can be taken as the most popular model among Protestant denominations and groups in Vietnam today as follows:

*A common worship ritual for every Sunday morning of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North)*

*Sample program of a worship service*

Ceremony master: Church administrator

Bible:

Instructions: Members of the Church Board of Directors or believers

Time: 1 hour 30 minutes

1. Sacred music ..... Church band

2. Bible verses (depending on topic)..... Instructor

3. Hymns..... Believers
4. Prayer ..... Pastor
5. Hymns.....Believers
6. The Apostles' Creed..... Believers
7. Hymns.....Singing band
8. Bible question and answer.....Believers
9. Announcement/consecration/intercession..... Board of deacons
10. Reading the Bible (according to the sermon).. A believer
11. Preaching..... Pastor or authorized  
believer of God
12. Prayer ..... Believers
13. Hymns..... Solo/ Group of  
songs/ Believers
14. Common prayer ..... Believers
15. Honor..... Believers
16. Blessings..... Pastor

#### All ceremonies

This is a traditional worship ritual of the Protestant community influenced by the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA), including the two largest organizations such as the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South) and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North). The latter has a large number of believers in the northern provinces of Vietnam today.

In addition, some other Protestant denominations and groups influenced by Pentecostal theology often focus on expressing emotions when worshiping: using strong movements when worshiping such as “burning” prayer, moving the body, crying, screaming, using electronic musical instruments with high volume to perform hymns, fasting, and collective prayer, etc.

#### *Rites system*

In the latest 2017 Charter of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North), the Church has the rites as follows:

1) Baptism; 2) Communion (the Lord's Supper); 3) Christmas; 4) Passion; 5) Easter; 6) Ascension; 7) The Holy Spirit descended; 8) The Marriage Ceremony; 9) Dedication of Children; 10) Funeral; 11) Anointing of the sick; 12) Pastor Ordination Ceremony; 13) Appointment Ceremony; 14) Church Dedication Ceremony; 15) Thanks Ceremony [the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North), 2017: 2].

These rites can be divided into two types:

The rites of celebration are as follows Christmas, Holy Communion, Easter, Ascension, and The Holy Spirit descended.

In addition, there are rites such as the Marriage Ceremony, Dedication of Children, Funeral Mass, Anointing of the sick, Pastor Ordination Ceremony, Appointments Ceremony, Church Dedication Ceremony, Thanks Ceremony, etc.

Protestantism (the Christian and Missionary Alliance- CMA), which follows the reforming spirit of J. Calvin, considers anniversaries to be just "commemorative" occasions to strengthen the faith of believers. Those days do not have a special sacred meaning as perceived by the Catholic Church.

Rites play an important role in the lives of Protestants and are a characteristic sign distinguishing the differences between Protestant churches and denominations. Some rites are also considered sacred sacraments in the ritual system. Baptism and Communion are particularly important to Protestants.

### **Baptism**

Baptism is clearly defined: "It is an initiation ceremony that believers must undergo to enter the visible Church... Baptism is not a method to be reborn like the teachings of the Roman Church and some reformed denominations; It is an outward sign testifying to inward salvation, which results in regeneration." [J. D. Olsen, 1957: 23].

The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) stipulates the Baptism as follows:

*Baptized person:* Must be twelve years old or older (the previous regulation was fourteen years old), have believed in God for at least three months, have learned the doctrine of Baptism, and be approved by the Pastor and the Executive Board of the local church to be qualified to receive Baptism.

*Only pastors can baptize,* other cases must be authorized by the Executive Board of the General Assembly.

Both the master pastor and the baptized person should wear ceremonial clothes. The master pastor must stand in the water, and the baptized person must be immersed in the water.

In the Hmong Protestant area, due to being instructed via radio, the first believers had baptized each other. Later, when they belonged to the organization of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) and other denominations, pastors were trained and ordained and they conducted this rite. In special cases, the General Assembly delegates certain individuals in that area to be in charge.

### ***Holy Communion***

The second important rite for Protestants is the Communion (Catholics call it the Eucharist). Protestantism in Vietnam does not consider this a sacrament, it is a celebration (remembrance) of the sacrifice and death of Jesus Christ to atone for the sins of mankind. Thanks the rite of Communion, the Church demonstrates communion with Christ in His death and resurrection.

### ***The new Rice rite replaces the Thanks Ceremony (Lễ Cảm tạ, Lễ Tạ ơn)***

The research on the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) and some denominations showed the *New Rice Rite (Lễ cơm mới)* has been found in the newly converted Hmong areas in Lai Chau and Lao Cai provinces. This rite is recorded in the worship program even though this ceremony is not included in the General Charter. It is probably the need for cultural integration of the Hmong people. It is just a side ceremony, similar to the Thanksgiving of American believers. Moreover, some traditional cultural elements of the Hmong people are

accepted in the worship of some denominations causing much controversy. A Protestant researcher wrote that “In addition to the division between Protestants and non-Protestants, Hmong Protestants in the Northern mountainous region are also divided by so-called pluralism within the Protestant community. Some believers reject all Hmong cultural practices if the Bible does not mention them, they have formed a “Puritan Hmong” (Hmông Thanh giáo) group that separated from their fellow believers who believe that it is not necessary to eliminate the entire Hmong cultural tradition”. “Hmong Christians have passed through two stages of division: the division between believers and non-believers, and the division among believers. The second division, the Hmong believers must find a solution to resolve this. Will this division lead to a Christian cultural war?” [the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North), 2019: 322].

In general, with the level of understanding of religion at an early stage and the life of faith still pristine, it is difficult for most Hmong believers and dignitaries to distinguish the differences in theological and doctrinal characteristics of denominations.

However, some pastors from different denominations have admitted that Hmong believers and dignitaries generally do not like and do not respond to the ritual of “speaking in tongues”, also known as “Baptism with the Holy Spirit” of some Pentecostal groups brought to the mountainous areas. For them, worshipping by crying, shaking, dancing... seems strange, not suitable for their psychology and culture. [Nguyen Xuan Hung, 2020].

In the Hmong region, the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Vietnam has recently been present and built several groups in Son La, Dien Bien, Lai Chau, and Lao Cai estimated total number of several hundred followers. The Seventh-day Adventist Church of Vietnam is different from other denominations in its regulations for believers to practice and worship God on Saturday. The rite of Communion is only celebrated every three months along with strict rules of the believer’s lifestyle. A pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Vietnam said that it was initially difficult to keep followers because they were

not familiar with the lifestyle and compliance with “God’s hygiene laws” that the church stipulates such as abstaining from pork, seafood, and catfish, birds, etc,... Therefore, it takes a long process to change their habits. [Nguyen Xuan Hung, 2020].

In general, preaching and practicing religion of denominations in Hmong communities (dignitaries and followers) in the mountainous areas are the same. What they need is a constant presence, spiritual support, and material assistance for each group.

In the delta and urban areas, although most Protestant denominations and groups are still rented places or private residences for religious practices, religious life is more regulated and normal.

In addition to participating in worship services on Sunday, Protestants are also attracted to the activities of associations according to age and gender with scheduled activities on weekdays (usually from Wednesday to Friday) arranged scientifically and with quite rich content. The Protestant activities of associations have recently been promoted, and Protestant dignitaries are making efforts to consolidate and restore the religious lifestyle that has been prescribed by the Church. Therefore, religious activities have attracted participants from all ages and genders. Prayer meetings (services), preaching, Bible classes, Hymns, Sunday School, etc. are regularly held with innovative forms and contents, attracting the participation of believers.

In urban areas, the rapid growth of believers with different residences, and lifestyles has also posed difficult problems for church organization and management. The trend is decentralization, dividing into small groups according to place of residence and profession to facilitate activities, worship, rituals, and care for believers. In community activities, more attention is paid to social programs preaching, and charity.

*Taking care, visiting, preserving believers and activities outside the church*

Although the organization is quite democratic with an emphasis on individual freedom and individual belief, Protestants often do not

like to live in a community. However, it does not mean that the church does not have measures to manage and preserve believers and bind them to their community. Due to the implementation of the aforementioned forms of activities, the relationship among believers, between believers and pastors, and missionaries is quite tight. In the religious living conditions of this religion in Vietnam, because it is a minority community among people with other religious beliefs, this is quite effective measure to strengthen religious faith for believers. However, strict “care” also has its drawbacks, which is the loss of individual freedom, when there are conflicts and frictions that are difficult to heal and have a severe impact on the activities of the local church.

In addition, the many changes in society, population, and immigration have led to Protestant churches being active in updating and finding ways to manage and develop their communities. Those are witnessing, religious activities according to gender, residential areas (high-rise buildings, industrial parks), religious activities for believers with different lifestyles and occupations in diverse forms, suitable for ages, levels of education, and interests of groups of believers.

## **2. Missionary activities**

Evangelization is the most important field of religion, closely related to the existence and development of each religion, so missionary activities are currently considered natural and legal work for each religion and are limited and guaranteed by law. For most Protestant organizations and denominations, there are two forms of Evangelization: 1) *Indirect Evangelization*: through health care, education, and community development activities, charity, relief, and aid to create sympathy; 2) *Direct Evangelization*: preaching and propagating religion directly.

Regarding the field of indirect evangelization through social activities, the author will mention it in another article. The analysis of the direct missionary activities of Protestant organizations and denominations is as follows:

Each Protestant is taught to use the Bible as the foundation of faith and life so he/she must carry out “The Great Commandment of God”, and “Bring God’s Gospel to everyone in the world”. Every Protestant is taught the duty and responsibility to do missionary work. This is not only “Fulfilling God’s Commandment” but also a practical work to expand the Church with many practical benefits in both religion and life. Therefore, the first job is to convince people to follow the religion. Protestants do not miss any opportunity to talk about their religion with relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbors... and invite them to join the religion.

Moreover, missionary activities play a leading role in inter-denominational religious activities that started in 2009 and 2010 with large-scale evangelical activities, followed by popular forms of activities such as outdoor sacred music nights with “The Korean Protestant Church”, which took place in 2010 and 2011 in Hanoi and Hai Phong, with the participation of thousands of people.

In June 2011, Vietnamese Protestant organizations organized a celebration of the 100th anniversary of Protestantism entering Vietnam in Hanoi and Da Nang. This event attracted delegates from several countries such as the United States and Canada. In particular, from June 20-21, 2011, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) and other denominations solemnly celebrated the 100th anniversary of Protestantism’s arrival in Vietnam (1911-2011) in Hanoi with the participation of about 5,000 people.

In addition, during Christmas and Easter, Protestant organizations and denominations organized evangelization in public places in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. They invited a famous missionary, Luis Palau for example, to preach. After a long period of preparation, in April 2011, Pastor Luis Palau along with a group of fourteen pastors, businessmen, and American experts arrived in Vietnam. Luis Palau had two major preaching sessions in Saigon on April 9-10. The session on April 10 had about 12,000 people attending. Although the program could not take place for many reasons, Pastor Luis Palau had a meeting with about two hundred pastors from many different

denominations at the Hanoi Hilton Hotel. Protestant dignitaries hope that the visits of famous missionaries through these influential events will contribute to bringing the Gospel to Vietnam.

In 2017, the Billy Graham missionary group cooperated with Protestant churches and denominations in Hanoi to organize the *Festival of Love Hanoi (Festival Yêu Hà Nội)* on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation with two nights of preaching. The event took place on December 8-9 at Quan Ngua Stadium, Hanoi, the speaker was Pastor Dr. Franklin Graham (son of evangelist Billy Graham). According to Protestant websites, the total number of attendees during the two-day Festival reached more than 50,000 people, and as a result, more than 4,000 people converted to Protestantism.

According to current regulations preaching can only take place within the premises of a place of worship. It makes Protestant denominations and groups find ways to adapt. In such a situation, Protestant missionary activities are still taking place in direct form, non-public preaching, expanding into society rather than being confined to the premises of the place of worship. Protestant organizations and denominations carry out evangelization using the “oil spill” method, the “cell division” method by direct “witnessing” combined with help, gifts, visits, etc... This belongs to the field of social and civil relations, so it cannot be limited or used administrative measures. It is the source of friction, causing religious and cultural conflicts and reactions in some northern localities in recent times.

Protestant organizations, denominations, and groups that have not yet been recognized and have just registered for religious activities at the ward and commune level are often the center of conflicts and reactions. Recently, there have been some extremist groups, with declarations and rituals contrary to traditional culture, showing signs of superstition, causing division in families and society, and conflicts with other religions, even with traditional Protestant denominations, complicating the security and order situation in some localities.

Currently, the Law on Belief and Religion has been implemented and stipulates in Article 46 about “ceremonies and preaching outside religious establishments and legal locations”, or in other words, a method of the presence or direct evangelization in public space. Accordingly, before organizing a ceremony outside a religious facility or registered legal location, the religious organization, affiliated religious organization, or organization that is granted a certificate of religious activity registration is responsible for sending a document with the content and form to request permission. If it is accepted, the event will be held.

There is a reality related to the issue of evangelization (both in places of worship and public places) associated with religious activities of unrecognized Protestant organizations, denominations that rent public places such as restaurants, hotels, tourist areas, etc. to organize celebrations and evangelize on Protestant celebrations such as Christmas, Easter, they often encounter many difficulties. These groups and denominations are mostly small-scale, “house churches” (Hội thánh tư gia), so the need and desire are to meet, and practice religious rituals together. This is an issue that management agencies and authorities at all levels need to pay attention to and create favour conditions for them to satisfy legitimate religious needs without violating the law, avoiding rigid decisions that cause them to react. For example, some gatherings and activities recently violated public order in Hanoi.

### **Conclusion**

The Protestant community in the North, after decades of development with many changes, has gradually stabilized and operated according to the law. However, as a result of spontaneous development over a long period, complex and diverse denominations, and several limitations of policies, there are still some problems in the religious activities of this community, especially in ethnic minority areas. It led to the low rate of registration for centralized religious activities, the issues of legal status, land, religious establishments, training, appointment, and transfer of dignitaries, etc...

However, the policies and laws of the Party and State towards Protestantism generally favored conditions for the religious activities of many followers and dignitaries, meeting the needs of the religious activities of the Protestant community. Missionary activities of Protestant organizations, denominations, and groups have recently flourished and have many new features. Although sometimes there are still activities that go beyond the framework of legal regulations, there has been a clear transformation: from illegal evangelization to activities protected by law.

The Protestant community in the North, led by the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North), along with other denominations, has affirmed its positive attitude towards society, and the country. These progressive activities initially have led to achievements and contributed to building a stable and developed society./.

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